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VERMONT'S VOICE FOR THE LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, AND TRANSGENDER COMMUNITY

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Vermonters Celebrate Pride and Civil Unions

BY PAUL OLSEN

BURLINGTON

Vermonters celebrated both gay pride and the first anniversary of Vermont's historic civil union law at the state's Pride Day celebration on June 16.

The scorching heat didn't dampen the enthusiasm of the Pride Day participants who marched through Burlington's downtown and held both pre- and post-parade rallies along the beautiful shores of Lake Champlain.

While gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender pride was the official theme of the day, the fact that civil unions survived legislative attempts to both repeal and water down the law was not far from the minds of many Pride Day revilers.

Openly gay state Rep. Bill Lippert (D-Hinesburg) told the crowd that although civil unions survived the recently concluded legislative session, the battle was not over. "Civil unions remains intact but civil unions has been under attack," he said. "The success of civil unions has brought the biggest anti-gay backlash in Vermont's history but we have stood firm and civil unions stand firm."

Lippert added that Vermont's civil union debate would likely continue into the elections in 2002. "We have a challenge," he said. "We need

to remember that this is a long-haul battle. We must mobilize ourselves for the election of 2002 in a way that we have not anticipated previously. They want to take back the state senate and governorship so they can take civil unions from us, but we will not let it happen. We must back candidates who support civil unions."

Sherry Corbin, a representative of the Vermont Freedom to Marry Task Force, echoed Lippert's sentiments. "As we celebrate new civil unions and celebrate the first year anniversary of old civil unions, let's remember that our job is not done," she said. "We're constantly under attack on this, and we've got a long way to go. We still have a lot of work to do."

In the closing weeks of the legislative session Vermont's House of Representatives approved H.502, a bill to repeal Vermont's landmark civil union law and replace it with a broader "reciprocal partnerships" law open to gay couples and blood relatives like two sisters or a father and his daughter.

Two separate efforts to repeal the civil union law outright failed by votes of 111 to 30 and 94 to 47.

Opponents of the reciprocal partnerships proposal charac-



Vermonters withstood the scorching heat to celebrate Pride Day on Saturday, June 16.

Photo: Sky DeMuro-Miller

Census Figures Show Increase in Same-Sex Households

BY PAUL OLSEN

BURLINGTON - Recently released U.S. Census data show a 422% increase in the number of same-sex partner households in Vermont. Census figures revealed 1,171 households headed by female couples and 762 households headed by male couples. Vermont's total population is just above 608,000.

Early last year, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) and Human Rights Campaign (HRC), both Washington DC based gay advocacy groups, joined forces to launch the "Make Your Family Count" educational campaign designed to encourage same-sex couples living in the same household to mark the "Unmarried Partners" option on the 2000 census form.

Dan Berns and Jay Schuster of Richmond said they didn't think twice about checking off the "unmarried partners" box. "We're civil unioned so we thought that that was the appropriate box," Berns said. "It was an easy decision for us."

HRC representatives welcomed Vermont's new census figures. "These figures represent a very positive trend,"

said David M. Smith, HRC's communications director. "In our opinion, the increase reveals more and more couples are willing to identify themselves as same-sex partners in a federal survey, but many continue to fear a backlash from anti-gay policies at the federal level, and continued societal anti-gay bias."

In spite of the fact that the number of same-sex partner households in Vermont increased from 370 in 1990 to 1,933 in 2000 and 88% percent of Vermont's 251 towns had same-sex partner couples living in them, many gay and lesbian activists believe that the new figures underestimate the true number of same-sex

partner households in the state.

"That's got to be a low estimate," said Keith Goslant, a representative of the Vermont Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Rights. "I think that we as a community, despite all of the advances that we have made in Vermont, are still a little apprehensive telling governmental agencies who we are and how to find us. I've had (civil union) couples calling me asking me about residency requirements because they didn't want their actual address put on the license. People are concerned about what it is that will ultimately

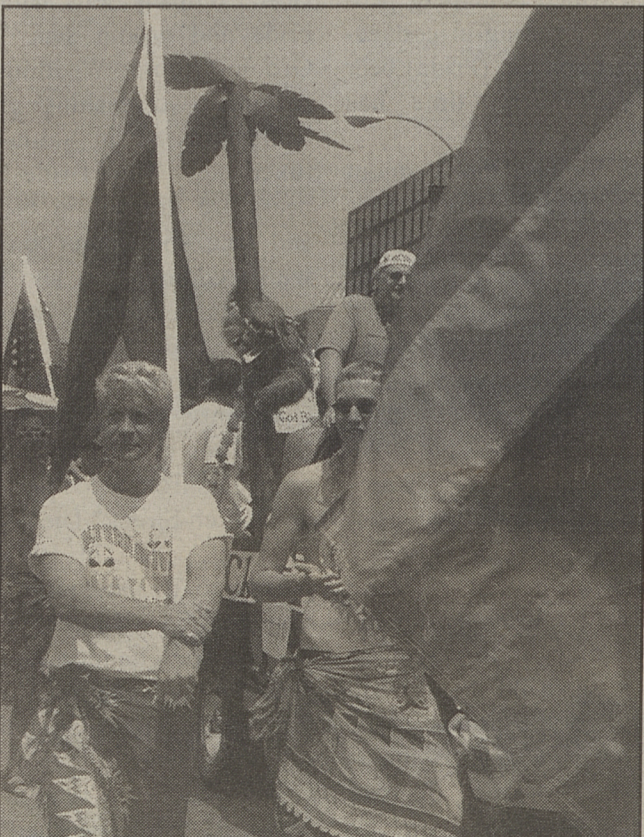


Photo: Sky DeMuro-Miller

Participants who marched through Burlington's downtown held both pre- and post-parade rallies by Lake Champlain.

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